

THE
Necessary Duty
OF
FAMILY PRAYER,
AND THE
Deplozable Condition
OF
Prayerless Families
CONSIDER'D;

In a LETTER from a Minister
to his Parishioners.

by Dr Woodward

With Prayers for their Use.

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and if Care be not there taken to prepare Per-
sons (especially in their tender Years) for
publick Teaching and Instruction, it is like
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in his Sermon concerning Family Religion.*

LONDON, Printed & Sold by J. Downing, in
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To his Parishioners ;

S H E W I N G,

The Necessary Duty of *Family-Prayer*,
and the Deplorable Condition of
Prayerless Families.

TH E Neglect of *Daily Prayer* is a Default of that High Nature and dismal Consequence, that my Desire of your Salvation constrains me, *my dear Brethren*, to try something out of the common Way of my *Pastoral Care*, in writing this Letter to you, to endeavour to reclaim you from it : For to live without Prayer, is to live as *without God in the World* ; as if we were sufficient to preserve and provide for our selves in all our Concerns, and despised Help from *Above* ; and as if we thought our selves so perfectly void of Sin, that we needed not God's Grace or Mercy : which is a very high Degree both of Impiety and Insolence, enough to make any one tremble that considers it, except it be the senseless *Atheist*, if there be any such Monster in the World.

I have very often shewn you both the

Sin and Danger of this inexcusable Neglect in my *Sermons*; and now I come to leave this standing Testimony of my Care for your Souls at your *Houses*, that the World may pronounce me clear of your *Blood*, if ye perish in this Criminal Omission: And perish ye will without all peradventure, if ye thus keep at distance from God by a constant Neglect of him, and hardening your Hearts against Him: For the Holy Ghost expressly testifies, That *such as are far from God shall perish*, (Plal. 73. 27.) And thereupon concludes, That *it is good to draw near unto God*, (Ver. 28.) And the Holy Scriptures throughout, which assure us on the one hand, That *if we seek God he will be found of us*, do as positively declare on the other hand, That *if we forsake God, he will cast us off for ever*.

This is most unquestionably applicable to every *Prayerless Person*, and will, I hope, awaken every one into whose Hands this Admonition shall fall, to a conscientious Observance of *daily Prayer*, thro' the Grace of *Almighty God* in our Lord *Jesus Christ*.

But my present Design is, to press the daily Exercise of Prayer in *Families*, without which no Family can begin or end any Day as they ought; because they neglect that *Morning and Evening Sacrifice*, which God requires at their Hands; and so they incur his *Displeasure*, when they might enjoy his *Blessing*.

St. Paul delivers our Master's Will to us as to this point, in these Words: *Put on the whole Armour of God,—praying always with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit,* (Eph. 6. 18.) which requires our constant Performance of *all kinds of Prayer*, in their Season, in a spiritual Manner. So that if we are wanting in the seasonable or due observance of *Secret Prayer* in our Closets, or of *Publick Prayer* in the Congregation, or of *Private Prayer* in our Families, our *Christian Armour* is not compleat, and we lie open in that Respect to the Arrows and Battery of our *Spiritual Enemies*, who seek all Advantages against us: Yea, and we thereby provoke God to deliver us up into their Hands, forasmuch as we do not crave his Aid, which is the only sufficient Protection from them: The Words of the Prophet *Jeremiah* are very dreadful, (*Jer. 10. 25.*) *Pour out thy Fury upon the Heathen that know thee not, and upon the Families that call not upon thy Name.* This is spoken indeed of the *Idolatrous Heathen*; but *Christian Families*, who have not so much Knowledge or Sense of God's Infinite Perfections, as to constrain them to call upon his Name, by daily Prayer, may read that Text with trembling Hearts, since they degenerate into the sinful Stupidity of the *Heathens* as to this; and if they contract the woful Guilt, they will be obnoxious to the dread-

ful Punishment: Yea, since *Christians* sin against clearer Light, stricter Vows, and more abundant Mercies than the *Heathens*, they must expect a greater *Condemnation*.

And here it is fit to be considered by all *Governours of Families*, with due Regard and Application; that those Sins which we might have prevented in our *Families*, by our *Religious Government* of them, will be most justly imputable to us before the *Judgment Seat* of our Lord. For in this we hide the *Talent* of Power and Authority, which our Lord gave us, in a *Napkin*, which ought to have been employed in his Service, and for the Good of those that he had committed to our Care. And surely the Cries and Accusations of Persons so near to us as those of our *Families*, will pierce us with a peculiar sharpness in the Day in which we must appear together before God, to give Account for all that we have done in the Body.

The Remark of the most Reverend Archbishop Tillotson is very apposite to this Case, and very awful and awakening: It ought, says he, to make us tremble, to think with what Bitterness and Rage our Children and Servants will fly in our Faces in the Judgment of the last Day, for having been the Cause of their Eternal Ruine, for want of due Care on our part to prevent it. In that Day, (continues he) next to God
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and our Consciences, our most terrible Accusers will be those of our own House; nay, those that came out of our own Bowels, and were not only a part of our Family, but of our selves. Consider this effectually, I beseech you, my Brethren whilst it may be prevented; for whosoever has the Sense and Bowels of a Man, must think such a Case intolerable, if he does indeed believe it.

A Christian Family is a Society of Persons that own the same God and Saviour, are obliged by the same Religious Vows and Rules, are agreed in the same Worship, encompassed with the same Infirmities, sensible of the same Wants, and liable to the same Dangers; so that they are all equally concern'd to unite their Hearts and Lips in the same Petitions to their Heavenly Father, and to sollicit his Mercy by the combined strength of their Faith and Prayers; especially considering that our blessed Saviour has made peculiar Promises of his gracious Presence, where Two or Three are met together in his Name. (Matth. 18. 19, 20.)

How then can a pious Master or Mistress of a Family remain unconcern'd in the loss of such daily Opportunities of glorifying GOD, and of receiving Benefits suitable to their common Necessities? of all which they wilfully deprive themselves and Families whilst they neglect to pray together.

The faithful Servants of God are distinguished by their pious *Honshold-Government*, both in the Old and New Testament. *Abraham* and *Joshua*, *Cornelius* and *Aquila*, stand renown'd upon Record for the Piety of their *Honsholds*, and will remain so to the end of the World. And surely, if the Faith and Zeal of a good *Honsholder* be duly vigorous and steadfast, he cannot but delight to call the little *Assembly* of his *Family* together to worship their Infinitely good and gracious God, in whose Hands their *Breath* is, and from whom cometh their Salvation. And such as have experienc'd the Satisfaction and Benefit of so doing, will rather chuse, with devout *Daniel*, to be thrown into a *Den of Lions*, than to omit the Seasons that are proper for this useful & delightful Practice.

It is Piety and Devotion that principally distinguishes a Family of *Christians* from a *Hut of Heathens*, and from a *Den of Wild Beasts*. Others eat, and drink, and converse together; but *Christians* worship, and praise, and serve God together, thro' the Mediation of his Son *Jesus Christ*.

And God blesses such *Devout Families* with peculiar Blessings. These are the proper means to promote *Religion* and *Virtue* in the several Members of the Family; and thus they will come to make Conscience of their *Relative* and *Social* Duties. The just Sense of Religion will make Children respectful

respectful & obedient to their Parents *for the Lord's Sake*; and will constrain Servants to be diligent, faithful and submissive to their Masters on *Earth*, from the fear of their *Master in Heaven*. And for the same Reason will the *Superiors* in such a Family be kind, affable, and gentle towards their *Inferiors*: And thus will the whole Family become peaceable, loving, and contented; for the *Spirit of Supplication* introduces the *Spirit of Wisdom, Holiness, and Peace*; and with all, they take the true Measures to have their lawful *Undertakings* and outward *Enjoyments* both blessed and sanctified.

Thus will a *Religious Family* appear honourable to all Men, especially to all *Virtuous and Pious People*, who cannot but rejoice to behold their pious Order, and their *Christian Fellowship and Deportment*; and will with *Admiration* call them *Blessed*, and affirm, That *God is among them of a Truth*.

But on the contrary, where the *Government* of a Family is not given to God by *Piety and Devotion*, it falls of course to the Devil, according to the measure of its *Impiety*; which will be apt to advance apace, from the want of a serious *Acknowledgment of God*, and devout *Application to Him*: And thus will such a Family be apt to grow dissolute, and to abound in *Vice, Discord, and Disorder*, and to be expos'd to many *Troubles and Calamities*. But

But I would not here be understood to sum up the whole matter of *Family Religion* in daily Prayer: There ought also to be the daily reading of *God's holy Word*, in a serious and attentive manner, with the use of some plain approved *Exposition* of it, for the benefit of the more ignorant, when Time best admits of it. There ought likewise to be an industrious recollection of *Sermons*, in the which they may mutually assist each other: They ought to praise God in *Psalms* and *Hymns* together, where they are capable of performing it with Decency and Convenience. The Children and Servants ought to be duly catechized. There ought to be a peculiar Regard to the *Lord's Day*, in which the Master of the Family is requir'd, by the express Law of God, to look to *all within his Gates*, whether *Domesticks* or *Strangers*, as in the *Fourth Commandment*. And there ought to be a just Discouragement of Vice, and Countenance of *Virtue*.

These things are of the greatest Importance; for hereby many a Person may be brought to a serious Sense of Religion, even in the defect of more *publick Ministrations* and may thus also be preserved in the most flagrant Contagion of *publick Debaucheries*, and under the most violent Rage of *publick Persecution*: And hereby may many a good *Minister* be train'd up for

for the Service of the Church of God, as we find in the Case of Timothy mentioned by St. Paul, (2 Tim. I. 5. 3. 15.) where the private Instructions of a pious Mother and Grandmother, serv'd to bring up a very good Bishop for the Church of Christ.

Yea, there cannot be a more effectual means taken to make a Nation virtuous and prosperous, than by introducing Christian Discipline and Devotion into Families. Could we bring this to prevail universally among us, in a serious and becoming manner; it would happily introduce that blessed Change which has been long desired, and with great Cost, Pains and Peril endeavour'd by many pious Persons among us; I mean, a National Reformation, which is the greatest of Earthly Blessings: And truly, this must be effected some way or other, or we shall certainly be ruined by our Iniquity. Now I say, the pious Regulation of Families in this Nation, would render the whole Nation regular and religious; as the healing of all the parts of a Leper makes the whole Body sound: And therefore every Governour of a Family, is either a Publick Benefactor, or a Publick Grievance, according to the good or ill management of his Family.

Upon the whole matter then; whosoever prudently consults the Glory of God, the Purity of his Church, the Interest of Religion, the Prosperity of his Country, the

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temporal and eternal Welfare of his Children, the Diligence and Faithfulness of his Servants, the Quietness and Comfort of his Family, the Honour of his Name, the Peace of his Conscience, and the Salvation of his Soul, will find constraining Reasons to engage in constant Family-Prayer, and religious Household Government; without which he appears too little concern'd for his greatest Publick and Private Interests on Earth, as well as for his Immortal Concerns.

And how will ye bear it, my Brethren, when ye come at last to sum up the Mercies ye lost for want of asking, and the Sins and Disorders that multiplied in your Families for want of a due discharge of your Duties, as the Governors thereof?

Truly, Sirs, my Heart bleeds, and my Bowels are pain'd, when I consider the dismal end of this Contempt of God. What can you say by way of Apology for so pernicious a Neglect? What Pain would it have put you too, to have worship'd God in your Family? What could you have lost by such a blessed and becoming Practice? How could you think it a Loss of Time from your other Business, when by it your other Affairs would certainly have prospered better in your hands? How could you restrain from Prayer under the many Doubts and Fears and Miseries of this uncertain Life? Since you acknowledg'd an infinitely

nately wise, great, and good God, that governs all things, how could you slight both his *Favour* and his *Wrath*? If you have a Friend on whom you very much depend for your outward *Livelihood*, you court and crouch to him continually, and gladly lay by all other *Business*, when you can do any thing to serve him: And can you neglect your *infinite Benefactor* from day to day? Does he not preserve your *Life* and *Being*? Does he not open his *Hand*, and fill you with all manner of *Plenteousness*? Does he not offer you the *Unsearchable Riches* of his Love in his only begotten Son? And must you not perish, now and for ever, without his *Grace* and *Mercy*? Alas! where is your *Reason*, your *Conscience*, your *common Sense*, when you omit any sort of *requisite Devotion* to our infinitely glorious and bountiful God, whom to serve is perfect *Freedom*, to whom to be related as a regenerate Child, is the greatest *Honour*, and whom to enjoy is the greatest *Happiness*.

How will the very *Heathens* rise up in the last Judgment and condemn you? They had a Notion of some *Deities* which particularly watch'd over their domestick Affairs, and defended and succoured them in their Houses: These they call'd *Lares* and *Penates*, and were punctual in their daily *Oblations* to them: These, alas! paid a

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Superstitious Worship to *Imaginary Deities*. But we have the Knowledge of the only true God, and the only *Mediator*, and the spiritual and true Worship which alone he will accept; And how inexcusable shall we be, if we put not our selves and Families under the shadow of his Wings? especially since we know his condescending Promise, That if we love him, and keep his Commandments, he will love us, and come unto us; and make his Abode with us.

Let me therefore beseech you, my Brethren, as you would give me Hope of doing any considerable Good among you, and of our comfortable meeting together in another World, That each of you would piously take up *Joshua's* Resolution: *As for me and my House, We will serve the Lord.* Shew your selves such serious *Votaries* of our holy Religion, as to call your Families together at least twice every day; and after the serious reading of some part of *God's* holy Word, unite your Prayers to your Heavenly Father, for his Blessings upon you in Soul and Body, in this Life and that to come: And may it please him, who sees you in secret, to reward you openly, amply, eternally. So prays

Your Affectionate Pastor,

J. W.

In the want of better Help and Ability, you may join in some such Prayers as these that follow.

PRAYERS

FOR

Families.

A Prayer for a Family in the Morning.

O Most Holy and blessed God ! who fillest all Places with thy Presence, and art a Searcher of all Hearts ; with thee is terrible Majesty to confound thine Enemies, but infinite Mercy withal to succour the humble and contrite Soul : We pray thee meet us not at this Time in thy just Vengeance, as a consuming Fire ; but be pleased to accept us graciously through thy Mercy in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Hope.

WE have indeed lived too long without just Apprehensions of thine infinite Perfections, and of our own Corruptions and Infirmities. We have wickedly followed our own vain Desires and Devices, and have not duly owned thy Sovereign-

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ty and Dominion over us. We have broken our Vows, and stifled our Consciences, and have defiled our Selves, and offended Thee, having set too lightly by the Promises and Threatnings of thy Book. O Lord, we lament our Impenitency and Unbelief, and all the sinful Fruits of our filthy and ungodly Hearts, Lips, and Lives. And we earnestly beseech thee, that thou wouldst not give us up to our own filthiness, and folly, and hardness of Heart: But that thou wouldst graciously reduce us into thy Fold and Favour, by the Power of thine Holy Spirit; and accept and pardon us through the Merit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

○ AND, O Lord, vouchsafe to cleanse and sanctify us in Soul and Body; and make us to glorify thy Name on Earth, and to do the Work thou hast given us to do. Be pleased to subdue our Corruptions, and to mortify every inordinate affection and unruly Passion; and make us entirely resigned to thy Will, and subservient to thy Praise, now and ever.

KEEP us, we beseech thee, from the Snares of worldly Pleasures and Enjoyments, and make us to set our Hearts on things above: And bring all the Powers of our Souls and Bodies into a willing Subjection to thy Rule and Government. And save us from all carnal Ignorance and Unbelief, and from all Ungodliness and sinful Indulgence of the Flesh. VOUCH-

VOUCHSAFE, Good God, to pity our Weakness and Imperfection; and to support us in all our Sorrows and Afflictions; And grant us a happy end of all our Sorrows at last in thine eternal Kingdom.

MAKE us ever mindful of the End for which we were made; and the cheif Work we have to do, and the uncertainty of this present Life: and affect us duly by the fore-thought of that unchangeable Eternity to which we are hastening.

MAY thy Faith and Fear ever dwell in our Hearts; that it may be our continual Exercise to keep our Consciences void of Offence, both towards thee our God, and towards all Men.

SUFFER us not to spend the Day of our Salvation idly and unprofitably: But make us to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling, through thy Grace and Spirit; that we may stand always upon our Watch, prepared for our Master's Call: That so whensoever thou shalt put an end to this mortal Life, it may be the Beginning of a blessed Immortality.

VOUCHSAFE, O Lord, to bless all our Governours in Church and State; and grant that they may be thy Ministers to us for good, and that we may never be guilty of any sinful disobedience towards them. And give to all the People of this Nation,

Nation, thy Grace to live in Unity and Godly Love, and to further each others present and eternal Welfare.

BE pleased to bless all our Relations and Friends; and multiply thy Mercies upon them in Blessings of this and of the other World. And vouchsafe to succour all that lie under any Sorrow or Affliction, and be near unto them in all they call upon thee for.

MANIFEST thine especial Love and Favour, we pray thee, to this Family; Vouchsafe to provide for us, and defend us by thy good Providence. Preserve us from all evil throughout this Day; prosper us in our lawful Affairs; let no Vice nor Variance prevail amongst us, but keep us in Christian Purity and Peace to our Lives end.

FINALLY, We praise thy great and glorious Name, for all thy Mercies towards us: For the Rest and Safety of the last Night, for the renew'd Comforts of this present Day, and all the good Providences of our past Life.

MORE especially for the means of Grace, the motions of thy Spirit, and for thy great Patience and Long-suffering towards us; but above all, for the Merits and Mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who ever liveth to make Intercession for us; for whose sake we beseech

seech thee to hear us, accept us, and pardon us, together with these our unworthy Prayers; in whose most holy Name and Words we further pray :

O U R Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name: Thy Kingdom come: Thy will be done in Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily Bread: And forgive us our Trespases as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil: For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

A Prayer for a Family in the Evening.

O Eternal God ! infinite in all Perfections, and worthy of all Praise, who wilt be glorified in or upon every Creature which thou hast made; It is meet that with fear and trembling we consider thy holy and righteous Attributes, and our own polluted Natures and sinful Lives.

O Lord, we have too much forgotten thee our Creator, in the days of our Youth, and have mispent too great a part of our precious time in Sin and Folly. Alas! with what Diligence have we serv'd the Flesh and the Devil, and this present World! and how little have we minded the Concerns

cerns of our Salvation and eternal Life ! we have not duly glorified thee, the God that madeſt us, and in whose Hands our Breath is ; but have acted in too many Instances as if we had been made only for this World, and to please our selves.

O, how juſtly may'ſt thou ſnatch away our Breath from us, ſince we have ſo much abuſed it in idle and ungodly Speeches ; and *call* us ſpeedily into another World, ſince we have ſo preſumptuouſly *built* our Hopes of Happineſs in this ! And ſhould this be thy Pleaſure and our Portion, O Lord, how could we appear before thee in the Guilt of Thouſands of unpardon'd Sins ! or how could we endure to *dwell with everlaſting Burnings* !

BUT with thee, O Bleſſed God, there is Infinite Mercy and Plenteous Redemption. Thou ſo loveſt the World, as to give thine only begotten Son, that *whoſoever believeth on him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting Life*. Lord, we deſire to believe on him, help us, we pray thee, againſt our Unbelief. Enable us to ſubmit *all* the powers of our Souls to him in his ſaving Offices ; and grant that we may ſo believe on him, that we may obtain Eternal Life through his Name.

BE pleaſed to take away *all* Impurity and Hypocriſie, *all* Inſenſibleneſs and Perverſeneſs from us, and make us thy willing

ling and obedient Servants for ever. We know that without Holiness none can enter into thy Kingdom : O Lord, make us holy through the effectual Regeneration and Sanctification of thine holy Spirit, that we may love thee with all our Hearts and Souls, and serve thee with our Might and Strength, and may delight to do thy Will, and to deny our selves for thy sake.

And since we have too long neglected that great *Salvation* which was purchased for us by the Blood of thy Son ; awaken us, we pray thee, to improve the remaining space of our days with all possible Care, giving all Diligence to make our *Calling and Election sure*.

Enable us to break loose from the snares of this present World, and from all the sinful Entanglements of the Flesh, and from the seducements of wicked and dissolute Men, that we may run with speed that Race which thou hast set before us, and may persevere in it to the Death, that we may in the end attain Everlasting Life.

To this end, make us habitually mindful of the shortness and uncertainty of this mortal Life, and the unprofitableness of all earthly things in the hour of Death, and in the other World. And make us now to chase thy favour as our chiefest good, thy Son as our Prince and Saviour, and thy Kingdom as our Portion. And when our
Souls

Souls shall be summoned to leave this earthly Tabernacle, vouchsafe, good God, to receive us into those everlasting Mansions which our Blessed Saviour has prepar'd for those that love him.

For whose sake, we pray thee, blest these Nations with Plenty, Peace, and Safety, and with the encrease of all that's good : And send Peace and Truth amongst all Nations.

Be pleas'd to bless and direct all that are set in Authority over us, and grant that they may govern us, and we obey them, in the fear of thee our God. Vouchsafe to succour all that are Objects of Misery, whether they labour under spiritual or temporal Afflictions; and be pleas'd to administer to them as their Necessities of Soul or Body require.

Be gracious to all our Relations and Friends, preserve them from all Evil, and bind up their Souls in the Bundle of Life.

Be more particularly gracious, we pray thee, to this Family, and to every particular Person in it. Be pleas'd to dwell with us, and rule over us : Preserve us in Peace and Safety, and let thy Spirit rule in every one of our Hearts, that we may faithfully discharge our respective Duties one to another, and may live in Christian union, purity, and peace. Vouchsafe, O thou that neither sleepest nor sleepest, to grant us thy Protection

tion this Night ; give thine holy Angels charge concerning us : Preserve us from Danger by Fire and Tempest, and from the Violence of unreasonable Men ; and suffer no Evil to befall any of us, nor any Plague to come nigh our Dwellings.

And forasmuch as we know not whether we shall see the Light of another day, be pleased, *good God*, now to seal to every Soul of us the Pardon of all our Sins, thro' the Blood of the New Testament ; that when we come to lie down upon our Death Beds, we may rest in Hope of a blessed Resurrection.

Finally, We laud and magnifie thine holy Name, O Lord, for thy goodness in our creation and daily preservation ; for our health, ease, peace, friends, food, rayment, deliverances, and all the comforts of this present life, and for all the means of attaining everlasting Happiness, for the Price which our *Lord Jesus Christ* has paid for our Redemption, for thy blessed Gospel, thine holy Ordinances, and all the Motions of thy good Spirit ; humbly imploring thy Grace, that we may so live to thy Praise here on Earth, that we may at last be join'd with glorified Saints and holy Angels, to praise thy Name for ever. All which we humbly beg for *Jesus Christ's* sake, in whose prevailing name and comprehensive words we conclude our unworthy Prayers, *Our Father, &c.*

F I N I S.

BOOKS *Writ by the late Reverend Dr. Woodward, and Sold by Joseph Downing.*

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